



PRESS RELEASE

Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation *Chief Richard Weber*

Date: Jan. 28, 2016

Contact: *CI-HQ-COMMUNICATIONSEDUCATION@ci.irs.gov
IRS – Criminal Investigation

CI Release #: CI-2016-01-28-B

Alabama Woman Sentenced to Prison for Involvement in Stolen Identity Tax Refund Fraud Ring

Filed 326 Fraudulent Tax Returns Seeking More than \$450,000 in Tax Refunds

A Phenix City, Alabama resident was sentenced to serve 51 months in prison, followed by three years of supervised release and ordered to pay \$116,636 in restitution for her role in a stolen identity refund fraud (SIRF) scheme, Acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciralo of the Justice Department's Tax Division and U.S. Attorney George L. Beck Jr. of the Middle District of Alabama announced today.

"Prosecuting stolen identity refund fraud remains a top priority of the department," said Assistant Attorney General Ciralo. "Individuals engaged in this criminal conduct not only cause millions of dollars in financial losses to the IRS, but inflict long-term economic and personal consequences on those US taxpayers whose private information is stolen. The Tax Division will continue to work with its federal, state and local law enforcement partners to combat this serious fraud on the American public, and seek lengthy terms of incarceration for those responsible."

"My office will continue to work with the IRS to vigorously prosecute those people who steal an innocent person's identity, just to file a false tax return and steal the tax refunds," said U.S. Attorney Beck. "These criminals need to be punished for the harm they cause to the person whose identity is stolen and the harm they cause to the U.S. taxpayer."

According to court documents, during 2013, Benita E. Short, conspired with others to defraud the United States by filing false federal income tax returns using stolen identities. Short obtained personal identifiable information, including names, social security numbers, addresses and dates of birth, without the individuals' authorization. A co-conspirator obtained the stolen personal identifiable information from an individual who had access to Alabama state databases and obtained Electronic Filing Identification Numbers (EFINs) in the names of several tax preparation businesses, and provided this information to Short. Short then used the stolen identities and EFINs to electronically file 326 fraudulent tax returns with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), causing a tax loss of \$456,853. Short also caused income tax refund checks that were

issued as a result of the fraudulent tax returns to be cashed at several businesses in Alabama and Georgia. For her role in the conspiracy, Short pleaded guilty in October 2015 to conspiracy to defraud the United States and aggravated identity theft.

In March 2015, one of Short's co-conspirators, Keshia Lanier, the ringleader of a \$24 million SIRF conspiracy, also pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. On Sept. 25, 2015, Lanier was sentenced to serve 15 years in prison to be followed by three years of supervised release and ordered to forfeit \$5,811,406.

In addition to the prison term, U.S. District Judge Myron H. Thompson of the Middle District of Alabama ordered Short to serve three years of supervised release and pay \$116,636 in restitution to the IRS. Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciralo and U.S. Attorney Beck Jr. commended special agents of IRS Criminal Investigation, who investigated the case and Trial Attorneys Michael C. Boteler and Michael P. Hatzimichalis of the Tax Division and Assistant U.S. Attorney Jonathan Ross of the Middle District of Alabama, who are prosecuting the case.

###